

B
A
U

T
O
P
P
I
A

CREATIVE
HUBS AS
FORGES OF
POSSIBILITY





Co-funded by the
European Union



european
creative
hubs
network

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

www.creativehubs.eu

The statements, reflections and opinions contained in this publication are solely those of the individual authors of texts and visual contributions, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or the publisher.

**D2.14 PRODUCE A HUB MEETUPS CONFERENCE SESSION
REPORT PUBLICATION, YEAR 2**

CREATIVE HUBS AS FORGES OF POSSIBILITY

CREATIVE HUBS AS FORGES OF POSSIBILITY p. 7
Introduction

RECLAIM PRODUCTION: RADICAL TOOLS FOR
EVERDAY LIFE p. 11
Ion Sørvin

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING
THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES p. 19
Andreea Iager Tako, Ilaria Esposito

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF CREATIVITY WITH
COMMUNITY-POWERED PLATFORMS p. 26
Atılım Sahin

THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE
WORKSPACES p. 33
Lorenzo Marmo

FABER/FOR p. 39
Oana Simionescu, Pepe Peralta Guerrero



CREATIVE HUBS AS FORGES OF POSSIBILITY

In an era marked by rapid urban transformation, precarious work conditions, and shifting cultural paradigms, creative hubs have emerged as vital engines of social imagination, place-making, and community resilience. These hubs are no longer peripheral spaces for niche practices. They are central actors in shaping how we live, work, and relate to one another in cities undergoing continuous change.

With the evocative title *Creative Hubs as Forges of Possibility*, this year's BauTopia 3 conference invited creatives to reflect on the evolving role of hub managers. These professionals are not merely logistical coordinators or cultural programmers. They are architects of collective imagination who play a crucial role in shaping dynamic, inclusive environments where creativity meets care, where ideas are translated into action, and where alternative models of organising, producing, and belonging can take shape.

Hubs are not just shared workspaces. They are living laboratories, places of experimentation, negotiation, and meaningful impact. Within them, creative practitioners, freelancers, artists, researchers, and local communities converge in hybrid collaborations that transcend disciplinary and institutional boundaries. As professional place-makers, hub managers design the conditions that allow these interactions to thrive. They curate not only programs but also cultures of trust, mutual support, and innovation. The BauTopia 3 conference highlighted this expanded understanding of creative hubs by reclaiming them as dynamic forges of situated knowledge. These are spaces where local histories, urgencies, and collective imaginaries intersect with global challenges. They offer opportunities for communities facing displacement, marginalisation, or cultural erasure to assert agency and co-create meaningful futures. In this way, creative hubs function as civic infrastructures that support cultural democracy, ecological responsibility, and social cohesion. The conference also explored how creative hubs operate within the tension between

precarity and possibility. Many of these hubs are underfunded, under-recognised, and structurally fragile. Despite this, they continue to hold space for experimentation and hope. Within them, emerging practices take root that defy standardised metrics and resist commodification. In these environments, care becomes a method, inclusion becomes a practice, and sustainability becomes a shared commitment shaped through relationships. As such, creative hubs become relational ecologies capable of nurturing shared visions and anchoring long-term cultural change. In the fullest sense, they are forges of possibility. They shape new forms of social organisation, model collaborative governance, and build plural futures from the ground up.

The European Creative Hubs Network organised this year's conference in collaboration with FABER and F O R, the hosting hub in Timisoara.



RECLAIM PRODUCTION: RADICAL TOOLS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

Founded in 1996 by a group of artists emerging from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, N55 began by collapsing the boundaries between life and practice. The group moved into a shared apartment with no bathroom or furniture, constructing everything themselves—bathtubs, hydroponic food systems, chairs, and toilets—turning these domestic necessities into artistic experiments. This DIY ethos extended into their publishing practice: inspired by Buckminster Fuller’s *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*¹, they began issuing manuals for each project, long before open-source culture took hold. Sharing, replication, and transparency were embedded from the beginning.

Jon Sørvin is a Danish artist, designer, and co-founder of the Copenhagen-based collective N55. Since 1996, the group has worked at the intersection of art, design, and everyday life, challenging conventional systems through radical, self-built infrastructures and public interventions. Their practice seeks to reconstruct the city from within by addressing basic needs and daily routines through artistic experimentation. In his keynote, Sørvin traces his trajectory from early collective living experiments to the development of modular cargo bikes as tools for sustainable, decentralized production.

¹ *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* is a 1969 book by architect, inventor, and systems theorist Buckminster Fuller. In it, Fuller presents Earth as a shared vessel traveling through space, one without an instruction manual, and calls for a collective rethinking of resource use, design, and responsibility. The book advocates for sustainable, systemic thinking and challenges conventional economic and political structures.

Their early work focused on reclaiming public and private space through modular, mobile systems. They built lightweight geodesic-inspired² housing that could be assembled without cranes, using durable stainless steel. One such home was installed illegally on a floating platform in central Copenhagen, where they lived for years. Their belief: if a structure was functional, beautiful, and generous to its surroundings, people would accept it, regardless of bureaucratic permissions.



Public Things, N55

followed. *Public Things* was a modular public living kit—baths, beds, music, toilets—assembled without a roof, suggesting a communal way of inhabiting public space. The *Snail Shell System* allowed for mobile living via an industrial box containing all essentials, including vacuum cleaners and kitchen systems. *Suspended Platforms Micro-Dwellings* explored landless and aquatic



Snail Shell System, N55

² The term “geodesic-inspired” refers to structures influenced by geodesic domes—spherical constructions made of interlocking triangles that distribute stress evenly. Popularized by Buckminster Fuller, geodesic designs are lightweight, resource-efficient, and structurally stable, often associated with alternative, self-built, or sustainable architecture.

living through reconfigurable structures that challenged the notion of fixed domesticity. Many projects were developed with input from engineers, students, or Sorvin's own

“We don't just want to be critical, we want to make alternatives visible, usable, and real.”

family. N55 collaborated with an engineer who had worked with NASA on early hydroponics, and incorporated principles from indigenous cultures, especially the nomadic Inuit model of seasonal cohabitation. Ownership, in this context, became a fluid concept: through projects like *Land* and *Rooms*, the group encouraged people to share privately owned land and domestic space by granting others formal access—a subtle judo move against the rigidity of property law. *Sorvin's* interventions weren't limited to housing. From mobile restaurants made with recycled airplane trolleys to air-filtering bicycles and self-assembling fabrication units, his works bridged the poetic and the pragmatic. Some took on sharper political

edges, like the *M55 Rocket System*, which dispersed genetically modified seeds over vast areas to provoke debate about biotechnology and land use.

Perhaps the most resonant and widely adopted of N55's ventures is the *XYZ Cargo* project. Developed from 2011 onward with designer Till Wolfer, these modular cargo bikes emerged from a desire to apply their artistic methodologies to objects of practical use. Unlike most cargo bikes in Denmark, imported from low-wage countries, XYZ bikes are built locally, using recyclable aluminum, with designs that are open-source for personal use but licensed for commercial production. No welding is required; instead, a system of well-defined modular joints, inspired by Gerrit Rietveld's repair, and adapt.



Cargo project, N55

The cargo bikes became a platform for experimentation in their own right: food carts, mobile libraries, taxi bikes, street offices, and even bikes that can produce other bikes. Some versions were designed to clean air while cycling; others were shown in exhibitions across Europe and Asia. This mobility served not only as a function, but as a political gesture, challenging the dominance of global supply

chains, promoting local tax revenues, and democratizing access to production knowledge.

The *XYZ Cargo* model is now supported by a decentralized network of local producers

“If you can build your own tools, you can change your own systems.”

across Europe, each licensed under fair agreements. This system allows economic value to remain in communities, while maintaining design integrity and a culture of sharing. For *Sørvin*, this is not simply a design solution but rather a blueprint for reclaiming autonomy over the tools and systems that shape daily life.

Recent works continue this trajectory. Together with architect Anne Romme, *Sørvin* designed a cluster of public art shelters for nature reserves in Denmark, combining recycled acrylics, local wool, and

long-lasting materials to create sculptural, open-access spaces for rest and gathering. Across all of *Sørvin's* and N55's projects, a

“Art becomes interesting when it enters everyday life, when it questions how we live, move, and relate to others.”

core principle endures: art should not merely represent alternative worlds—it should build them. Through open designs, public experiments, and socially embedded tools, his work invites us to reimagine production as a collective, creative, and deeply human act.





SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICES

In the evolving landscape of cities and rural areas across Europe, creative hubs are emerging as key drivers of social transformation. No longer confined to the production and display of culture, these spaces increasingly operate as platforms for care, inclusion, and civic experimentation. Their work sits at the intersection of artistic practice, community engagement, and spatial reimagining, challenging traditional notions of who culture is for and how it is made.

At the core of these new approaches is a recognition that social inclusion is not an auxiliary aim but a structural principle. The physical, symbolic, and institutional boundaries that define cultural participation must be constantly interrogated and reshaped. Who is present? Who is missing? What are the visible and invisible barriers such as economic, linguistic, physical, or

psychological factors that shape who feels welcome, safe, or represented in creative spaces? These questions guide a growing number of practitioners toward more open, participatory, and context-sensitive models of cultural work.

Future DiverCities is a four-year European cooperation project (2021–2025), co-funded by Creative Europe, that explores how cultural and artistic interventions can serve as a catalyst for ecological regeneration in underused urban and rural areas. By combining artistic practices, community engagement, and environmental thinking, the project aims to prototype new forms of sustainable place-making across Europe.

The project unfolds through eight pilot sites, each shaped by the specific needs of their local environment, and organized into three thematic clusters, each representing a unique ecological entry point: Biodiversity, Commoning and Impermanence.

Examples from initiatives such as *GreenFeel* in Timișoara (Romania) and *A Dimora* in Londa (Italy) illustrate how art and culture can facilitate deeper community rootedness and shared agency. Developed as part of the European project *Future DiverCities*, both initiatives explore how artistic and civic practices can activate underused spaces through inclusive, locally driven approaches. In Timișoara, an overlooked urban garden became the site of a collective transformation process, blending ecological restoration with participatory design and inclusive programming. Residents were not simply invited to attend events; they became co-authors in reactivating the space. A semi-permanent structure, the PLAI Pavilion, emerged as a flexible classroom, gathering place, and cultural node. Its openness and adaptability exemplify a design logic that

accommodates both seasonal rhythms and evolving social needs.

In Londa, artists live and work within the community through the A Dimora residency program, embedding themselves in local life to co-create work that resonates with the landscape and its people. Here, the artist is not a visitor but a catalyst for social dialogue, listening closely and engaging deeply with context. The emphasis lies not on product but on process, on relationships, gestures, and conversations that have the power to reconfigure how places are seen and lived.

These approaches are not isolated gestures. They represent a wider movement within the cultural field that seeks to redefine participation not as an outcome measured by attendance but as a relationship, an ethic, and a practice. Participation in this sense is slow, porous, and reciprocal. It resists the quick win of the event and embraces the complexity of cohabitation, conflict, repair, and shared making.

An essential aspect of this work is the practice of commoning, which refers to the collective stewardship of resources, spaces, and narratives. In many cities, cultural actors are forming alliances with local communities to co-create shared infrastructures: community gardens, open kitchens, listening rooms, and mobile stages. These are not only tools for cultural production but also civic propositions that challenge exclusion, privatization, and disconnection. They invite us to imagine new ways of living and making together.

Inclusion, therefore, must be seen as a dynamic process rather than a static checklist. It is contingent on the ability of institutions and cultural practitioners to adapt, to listen, to change, and to redistribute power. It requires sensitivity to place, to the histories and traumas embedded in the built environment, and to the lived experiences of those often pushed to the margins. It involves working across scales, from the intimacy of a shared meal to the long-term politics of land use and governance.

Creative hubs are uniquely positioned to operate within this landscape of complexity. Their hybrid nature as community spaces, production labs, and civic forums allows them to experiment with forms of cultural infrastructure that are more inclusive, more ecological, and more co-authored. Rather than imposing models from above, they invite local responses, prototyping alternatives from the ground up.

In an era marked by polarisation, disconnection, and ecological crisis, the work of cultural inclusion and community building is more urgent than ever. Creative hubs can play a pivotal role in this process not by offering answers, but by opening spaces of encounter, imagination, and negotiation. They remind us that culture is not simply a reflection of society; it is a tool to reshape it.

Through sustained collaboration, critical reflection, and spatial sensitivity, creative hubs are not just hosting culture. They are helping to build the social and spatial commons we urgently need.





PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF CREATIVITY WITH COMMUNITY-POWERED PLATFORMS

Atılım Sahin is a community weaver, a facilitator, and an interaction designer who endeavours to create meaningful connections between individuals and organizations, especially within the fields of creativity, design, and technology. He is the Co-founder and COO at Neol, a community-powered platform for creative leaders and talent to pursue innovative work.

In recent years, the cultural and creative sectors have undergone a radical transformation in how work is organized, how creativity is activated, and how communities form and sustain themselves. Decentralized and community-powered systems are increasingly redefining both the creative process and the structures that support it.

One emerging vision centers around the idea of community-powered platforms. These are flexible and collaborative ecosystems where creativity is not dictated by hierarchy but emerges through relationships. Such platforms bring together independent creative leaders and interdisciplinary teams and connect them with organizations that seek purposeful and agile collaboration. What began as small-scale design studios in urban contexts has

evolved into expansive digital infrastructures that mobilize talent around impact-driven and co-created projects. At the heart of this approach is a belief that creativity is not an individual trait but a collective force. Creativity happens in networks, not in silos. The language used to describe this shift is important. Instead of speaking about building communities, a term that implies control and design, many now prefer to speak about growing them, as one would grow a garden. This change in vocabulary reflects a deeper commitment to organic development, diversity, mutual care, and shared ownership.

“Communities aren’t built, they’re grown. Like gardens, they need care, time, and the right conditions to flourish.”

Five key pillars support the growth of purpose-driven creative communities. These pillars are people, purpose, systems, experience, and growth. Together, they address everything from who is included in a community, and who may be excluded, to how its structures support trust, reciprocity, and long-term engagement. Tensions often

arise in these ecosystems. Balancing similarity with diversity or reconciling organizational goals with personal motivations is part of the ongoing negotiation that keeps communities adaptable and alive. A thoughtful framework for navigating such creative tensions helps ensure that collaboration remains open, responsive, and generative.

As freelance culture and remote collaboration become increasingly common, a shift is taking place from what is often called the gig economy toward something better described as a teams economy. Individuals today seek to work in flexible and self-organized networks that are capable of managing complex and interdisciplinary projects.

“Creativity doesn’t happen in isolation, it emerges in networks, in the space between people. Our work is to create the conditions for those connections to thrive.”

NEOL is a platform that exemplifies this shift. It supports a new generation of independent creative leaders by connecting

highly experienced professionals in design, strategy, and innovation with organizations looking for values-driven and high-impact collaboration. NEOL does more than match talent to projects. It helps form agile teams, supports peer learning through curated programs such as Creative Sparks, and hosts thematic working groups that explore issues like sustainability, identity, and social impact.

The ambition of platforms like NEOL goes beyond coordination and project delivery. They also propose new models of ownership and value distribution. Drawing inspiration from blockchain and Web3 technologies, these platforms offer ways to document contributions, recognize effort, and share value more equitably across communities. Rather than relying on centralized control, they are evolving toward becoming community-led and eventually community-owned. In this way, they embody the principles of decentralization, trust, and reciprocity.

In this emerging paradigm, communities are no longer seen as passive audiences or consumers. They are active participants. They are co-authors, co-owners, and co-leaders who shape not only creative

Neol operates as a community-powered platform, designed to mobilize creative leaders, independent talents, and impact-focused companies. It intentionally assembles small, purpose-driven teams to tackle projects with a high degree of flexibility and mutual trust. These are not fixed design studios or agencies with traditional hierarchies but rather ecosystems of co-creation, built around pods focused on themes such as climate, AI, venture building, and the future of work.

outcomes but also the systems and relationships through which creativity unfolds and thrives.





Credits: Markus Spiske

THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACES

Across Europe, collaborative workspaces (CWS) are multiplying and quietly reshaping how people gather, work, and create. A recent study surveying 273 such hubs across 34 countries offers a detailed glimpse into this evolving landscape, capturing both the material conditions and the sociocultural functions that define these spaces.

The majority of creative hubs are located in urban settings, drawn by density, infrastructure, and proximity to cultural circuits. But their reach is expanding. A significant portion is now situated in towns, suburbs, and rural areas. Especially in the last few years, new hubs have begun to take root outside major cities. This trend is likely shaped by the rise of remote work and broader lifestyle shifts following the COVID-19 pandemic. The move beyond the urban core reflects a subtle but significant

transformation in how creativity is spatially and socially organized.

While most of these spaces still self-identify as coworking spaces, the terminology used by their managers is strikingly diverse. They describe themselves as creative and cultural hubs, start-up incubators, makerspaces, artist residencies, youth centres, Fab Labs. This fluid identity signals a defining characteristic of creative hubs: their hybridity. They are places where different logics converge. Productivity and play, commerce and care, community and experimentation all meet within their walls. The infrastructure of these hubs mirrors this hybridity. Nearly all offer meeting rooms and social areas, and many include hot desks, event rooms, private offices, and outdoor space. Their average size is 1,182 square meters, but this varies widely. Size correlates with other factors too. Larger hubs tend to rely more on paid labour and market revenue, while smaller ones often depend on volunteer efforts and public or personal funding.

Labour itself is distributed across a spectrum of commitment and compensation. On average, each collaborative workspace employs around

three to four full-time and one to two part-time staff, while also engaging two to three volunteers. In total, volunteers contribute roughly one-fifth of the weekly working hours. Hubs outside cities show a greater reliance on volunteer labour, reflecting both resource constraints and strong community involvement. These figures underline that creative hubs are not only physical infrastructures but also social ones, held together by relationships, trust, and shared intent.

Financial models are similarly plural. While renting out space remains the primary revenue stream for most hubs, many also depend on workshops, events, local subsidies, or personal investments. A third of hubs own their premises, but nearly half rent from private landlords. Ten percent operate in spaces granted by public institutions free of charge. This patchwork of funding and ownership reveals both resilience and precarity. Many hubs operate at the intersection of the market and the commons, sustaining themselves through a delicate balancing act between financial viability and social value.

Occupancy rates average 42 percent, suggesting untapped potential. At the same

time, many hubs intentionally remain open and flexible. A considerable number welcome people from beyond their immediate municipality, especially in rural regions. These are not closed systems but porous platforms for exchange. They host locals and visitors alike and foster new rhythms of life and work.

Crucially, almost half of the labour time in creative hubs is devoted to social curation. This is the unseen work of creating atmosphere, trust, and connection. It is not peripheral. It is foundational. Especially in smaller and non-urban hubs, social curation often outweighs administrative or logistical work. In these contexts, the hub becomes more than just a venue. It becomes a vessel for shared imagination and situated cultural production.

This text is based on research conducted by Lorenzo Marmo within the CORAL – Innovative Training Network. For more information, visit coral-itn.eu.

This portrait of creative hubs reveals a complex ecology of spaces. They are mobile, mutable, and multi-purpose. They are not monolithic institutions but living organisms, adapting to their environment and shaped by the people who inhabit them. They do not only respond to needs. They prefigure new ways of living and working. In that sense, they are not simply

functional infrastructures. They are forges of possibility.



FABER/FOR

In Timișoara, Romania, FABER / F O R is an independent cultural center founded by a group of local entrepreneurs working in architecture, IT, and the socio-cultural sector. United by a shared belief in Timișoara's potential and a desire to strengthen the city's creative industries, the group came together in 2017. That year, they purchased an industrial warehouse in the AZUR complex and began transforming it into what is now the FABER building. Since its inauguration in 2020, the FABER team has become a driving force in producing socio-cultural, visual, experimental, artistic, and musical content. The name FABER comes from the philosophical concept "Homo Faber" — the creative human — a term proposed by Hannah Arendt and Max Scheler to describe a person capable of shaping their environment through tools and invention. FABER offers an inspiring and supportive space where people with ideas can find the infrastructure, working methods, and

community to bring their visions to life. It functions as a co-working hub, event venue, and home to Ambasadă, a warm and welcoming social bistro.

Located on the banks of the Bega River in the Fabric district, the FABER building is the result of the careful rehabilitation and transformation of an industrial structure within the historic Azur complex. The Azur factory, whose roots date back nearly 200 years to the Farber family of Timișoara, remains an ongoing source of inspiration. This connection to a legacy of creative entrepreneurship also informs FABER's evolving identity.

The architectural merits of the FABER space received international recognition soon after its opening. In the 2020 New European Bauhaus awards, FABER was named one of three European finalists in the "Buildings Renovated in the Spirit of Circularity" category. That same year, the architects behind the project — the FOR team — were nominated for the prestigious Mies van der Rohe European Prize for Architecture.

Today, the FABER building hosts around 20 companies and freelance teams working across architecture, design, 3D production,

textile and music production, and content creation. It offers a creative environment ideally suited for cultural organizations and companies to organize their own medium- and large-scale events.

Since 2024, FABER has expanded its programming to include a dedicated focus on the textile industry. The initiative explores this field not only as a site of automation, outsourcing, and global networks, but also as a space of resilience and invisibility.

Beyond the local context, FABER is deeply embedded in European cultural and creative networks. It played an active role in Timișoara's year as European Capital of Culture 2023, contributing to the Bright Cityscapes program. FABER's thoughtful renovation and emphasis on sustainability, circularity, and community earned it recognition once again in the New European Bauhaus prizes. As a member of the European Creative Hubs Network, FABER continues to collaborate internationally and share its knowledge, amplifying its impact across borders.



B A U T O P I A

Co-funded by the
European Union

